



MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Updates and Information from the Atlantic County Office

National Recovery Month and Suicide Awareness

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Recovery Month has "some explaining to do"

BY BETH WADE
Public Relations Specialist

Recovery

"A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential." Definition of recovery from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA. Leaders in behavioral health, mental health and substance use met and arrived at these words in 2010.

To many of us, this word "recovery" is among the most beautiful words in the English language.

And so, when National Recovery Month appeared on my radar, I searched for ways to properly acknowledge and celebrate during September. Should have been easy, straightforward, right?

Nope.

Recovery Month took me down an unexpected path. And, if you're reading this, you're going along with me.

Recovery is most frequently associated with addiction. That part was clear to me. But what about mental health? I hear people use "recovery" in these circles as well.

Is September specifically set aside for recovery from addiction? To a lot of people, yes.

But it isn't.

SAMHSA officially designates Recovery Month for both addiction and mental health. A quick check of the National Association for Addictions Professionals site celebrates both as well. But when you look at the CDC and New Jersey Department of Health, the focus is addiction recovery.

Locally, a few of our community partners in addiction, thought September was strictly for addiction recovery, too. Brian Wilson, Atlantic County Municipal Alliance Coordinator said he's attended numerous Recovery Month events throughout the years, and all have focused primarily on substance use.

"It wasn't until recently that I learned recovery month included mental health," he said. "The fact of the matter is that mental illness and substance use disorder coexist [co-occurring] in a majority of the cases. Those with a mental illness are more likely to experience a substance use disorder than those not affected. When we bridge this gap between mental health and addiction, we'll be more prepared to attack substance use disorder, the opioid epidemic."

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As part of his job, Brian gives many prevention-focused presentations in the community – and that includes the basic science of drug use and how introducing substances to the brain changes its chemistry.

Our director, Vicki Phillips, looked up the history of addiction in the DSM during a conversation on this subject. She found that addiction appears originally in 1952 and subsequently abuse dependence was added in 1980. Worthwhile to repeat for those who do not know that substance use is a mental health disorder.

Another one of our Stigma Free Atlantic partners, Gretchen Halfpenny, Coordinator of the local Overdose Fatality Response Team, said her perception was also that September is about addiction recovery. She has 30 years experience as a social worker.

“I guarantee you it’s focused on people who think about recovery and addiction,” she said. “And when I started Stigma Free, I was very much thinking, ‘This is substance use.’ But since Stigma Free I see they [mental health and substance use] are very much combined.”

She pointed to data collected in Atlantic County last year that tracked fatal overdose statistics. She said that 48 percent of the people who died from overdose were known to be living with a mental health disorder, including PTSD, bipolar, depression, and anxiety. However, that number is likely higher since mental health disorders are underdiagnosed.

So why go down this path? Because it matters. Education and awareness are worthwhile pursuits.

There are reasons why mental health is excluded in people’s perception of Recovery Month. Vicki suggested it is sometimes self-imposed stigma. There’s less shame associated with addiction than mental health, which seems likely to be true.

Too many people in our community aren’t making the connection (the “gap” that Brian talked about a few paragraphs above).

If we’re going to celebrate Recovery Month – services, professionals, the peer community, and evidence-based practices – it’s important to start with the basics. Around 2012, the governing body in New Jersey moved addictions under the same umbrella as mental health, and it makes sense.

Substance use and mental health are related and sometimes co-occurring. We are often partners in the pursuit of recovery on behalf of many people in our community. We want EVERYONE who contributes to the recovery of mental health and substance use to be seen, appreciated, and understood this month.

Let’s heartily celebrate this beautiful word, this shared word, “recovery.” Let’s also recognize and appreciate all the associated people and programs that help others achieve recovery. And, while doing so, let’s clarify what the month is all about so all can shine in a most well-deserved spotlight.

— “ —

Substance use and addiction can contribute to the development of mental illness. Substance use can lead to changes in some of the same brain areas that are disrupted in other mental disorders, such as schizophrenia, anxiety, mood, or impulse-control disorders.

**National Institute
on Drug Abuse**

— ” —



Mental health and substance use disorders share some underlying causes, including changes in brain composition, genetic vulnerabilities, and early exposure to stress or trauma.

SAMSHA

Special thanks to Brian Wilson (above) and Gretchen Halfpenny (below) for your contributions to recovery efforts in Atlantic County. We are also grateful for your input on this article.



Turning the corner

BY: Beth Wade
Public Relations Specialist

Figuratively speaking, a black and white checkered flag waves for Chris M. whose “race” was ironically won with slow but steady work.

Though she’d passed her driver’s test 5 years ago, she’d not been driving regularly. Eventually she stopped altogether. Getting behind the wheel had been a tough task for Chris who had been nearly struck by a vehicle twice while working as a driver’s assistant for a popular mail delivery service. On top of those close calls, she lives with major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder.

Further complicating the situation were her initial driving lessons with a high-strung, pretty impatient family member who tended to speak loudly and forcefully.

“I was dissuaded from mistakes to the point of pathology (to the point of suffering and disease/sickness),” she remembers.

Chris said she developed a habit of hesitating, especially in a four-way stop or in situations with a pedestrian. She’d gone to a driving school at age 21 upon the urging of her family member. After spending \$200 on school, she didn’t feel much different.

Despite her license and initial desire to drive, she’d decided to put away the keys. Instead, she often relied on public transportation or a taxi for doctors’ appointments. Sometimes a family member would drive her where she needed to go. She opted to walk to most places, including her job.

That combination worked for a long time, until she began to long for her independence. She also wanted the luxury of dependable, timely transportation, which meant relying on herself.

At the time, she was receiving supports and services at AtlantiCare Behavioral Health as well as a therapist. Chris was referred to our Consumer Advocates/POST Team where she could work one-on-one with staff. After meeting MHA Atlantic’s Emily McCall, Chris knew she’d found a good match and mentor.

“She’s my age and had struggled with similar things,” said Chris. “It was comforting to know I wasn’t the only one.”

Together they agreed on an approach that began with Chris following Emily in the car. Early on, the first trips were from Hammonton to Atco. She succeeded, so the trips became farther, longer, and in different directions. Once Chris became comfortable, they switched – Chris drove in front with Emily following.

Chris said she’s grateful for Emily’s gentle approach and the luxury to work on the goal at a pace that was comfortable. For six months, Chris persevered and finally met her goal of driving on her own.

“She pushed through despite her anxiety and other obstacles going on around her,” said Emily. “Watching her grow and become more comfortable behind the wheel was inspiring.”

Emily said Chris’ confidence not only showed in meeting the goal, but in discussing mental health and tackling other obstacles.

Just recently Chris drove herself to a doctor’s appointment – her first trip on her own. She celebrated with a tub of Chocolate Haagen-Dazs ice cream, slightly softened, just the way she likes it.

“Some of the best ice cream I ever ate was at Kolb’s Dairy Farm in Chester County, Pennsylvania,” she said. “I’m feeling like I might be ready to drive the Expressway. Maybe I’ll get back to Kolb’s one day. I’d like that.”

Getting back behind the
wheel helped Chris gain
her independence and
so much more



*For information on the
Consumer Advocates/POST Program,
email emccall@mhanj.org or
call 609-652-3800 ext. 0308*



Pictured above: Emily McCall, Support Service Coordinator, and consumer Chris M. who met a driving goal through Consumer Advocates/POST.

MHA - Acute Care Family Program

Support and assistance for families with a loved one in crisis and in need of linkage to treatment and other services.

**7 days per week
Available 8 am to 8 pm
609-517-8614**

Our team engages families who are often navigating the mental health system for the first time. Staff educate families about mental illness and offer resources and referrals that can help their loved one

**When your family needs help...
we are a phone call away
609-517-8614**



NAMI Hosts Monthly Support Groups in Somers Point

NAMI Family Support is a support group for adults (18+) with a loved one with a mental health condition. Participants gain insight from the challenges and successes of others facing similar experiences in an empathetic and supportive environment.

**Register online at namiacm.org
or call (609) 741-5125.**

Meeting held the 2nd Monday of the month in St. Joseph's Catholic Church, 606 Shore Road, Somers Point, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Peer Run Support Groups



United By Wellness (UBW) is a virtual wellness center where peers offer hope and skills for recovery to people living with mental illness and/or substance use disorder. This is accomplished by providing support, education and advocacy in a safe, and diverse community which embraces the uniqueness of its members and their chosen path toward recovery.

United By Wellness Center is a virtual center designed to engage all members to promote a sense of commonality... purpose...unity. Within the umbrella of the UBW community, members will be able to explore sub-communities for engagement depending on their interests or needs.

Join United By Wellness at
<https://mhaac.info/ubw-how-to-join.html>
More than 30 weekly groups offered

**Your NAMI Connection is a recovery support group for adults (18+) who have experienced symptoms of a mental health condition or a dual diagnosis. Participants gain the support of peers who understand their experience and gain insight into others' challenges and successes.
(See NAMI above for date/time/location)**

September Wellness Bulletin Board



Self-Care for the Caregiver

presentations offered by Cape Atlantic Caregiver Coalition

Tuesday, Sept. 19 at 2 pm
Ventnor Library

Thursday, Sept. 21 at 2:30 pm
Hammonton Library

Tuesday, Sept. 26 at 2 pm
Somers Point Library

Ventnor Cultural Arts Center

Classes in pottery,
watercolors/mixed media, oils and
acrylics, pastels, jewelry making.
Ballroom dancing for beginners.

\$20 per class
609.823.7952

Local Events

Margate Fall Funfest
Sat., Sept. 23 11am to 6 pm, Sunday 11-4
music, food, characters, parade,
cornhole tournament, dog show, kids
activities, fine arts and crafts

CREEKFEST
Music and Food Truck Festival
Sat., Sept. 17 2pm to 8pm
Absecon Creek Boat Ramp
527 4th Street

BARK IN THE PARK

Saturday, Sept. 16
11 am to 5 pm
4-H Fairgrounds, Rte. 50 Mays Landing
Dog-friendly, family-friendly event.
Tickets \$7 (Kids under 12 are free)
Beer Garden and games, Participation dog show, Dog vs
Human Pie Eating Contest, Dog Musical Sit Game, Dog
Training Demos, Kids' Face Painting & Duck Pond,
DJ Music, Food trucks and more than 100 vendors



Weekly Tues and Sun 8 am to 4 pm
Admission and parking are always free.
Donations accepted

At the Library this month

Yoga, Houseplanting 101, Mah Jongg
game instruction (tile game that
originated in Asia), adult board game
nights, DIY Wine Cork Pumpkin
Making, Senior Craft and Activities,
Crochet Club

See dates and times on
atlanticcountylibrary.org
or call the branch closest to you.

*Some events require registration.

What's it matter to ya?

By Beth Wade
Public Relations Specialist

- ✓ affordable housing
- ✓ public transportation
- ✓ employment
- ✓ emotional support animals
- ✓ (Insert your issue here)

This fall an exciting, new statewide initiative that aims to empower and support individuals who live with any type of disability about how to advocate for change and become representatives at various levels of civic involvement will be provided through a series of workshops and one-to-one support.

Two partnering agencies who applied for and received the grant – The Atlantic Center for Independent Living, ACIL, and MHA Atlantic -- will outreach and engage interested participants who wish to become more involved in local or statewide leadership roles, meaning members of non-profit boards, members of new or existing coalitions or committees, and other advisory and leadership roles.

“For me, I just think that the key to everything comes down to being present. We need to be present to see changes in systems, laws, and policies,” said Donald Campbell, Executive Director of the Atlantic Center for Independent Living, ACIL. “Decisions are made by people who show up at the table. We are preparing people to be at the table.”

Toward that end, among the topics covered in the online workshops are public speaking, active listening, letter-writing, negotiation, compromise, and the process for getting legislation passed. (See sidebar for full details.)

Leaders at the nonprofits who are heading up this initiative say individuals who want to champion a specific issue, such as affordable housing, public transportation improvements, employment, access, service animals and emotional support animals, for example, will benefit from skill-building, education on how government works, and follow-up supports.

ACIL and MHA Atlantic are long-time community partners and now are collaborators on this project, which is grant-funded. For MHA Atlantic, the opportunity to participate in this endeavor was a natural fit.

“Sometimes we hear very passionate people in our groups who are outraged by something that’s happened. Then we’d follow up and ask, ‘How is that going, how did it go?’ Consistently, we see there’s a barrier about resolving an issue – maybe their skill set or confidence, for example,” said Carolyn Quinn, Director of Community Engagement at MHA Atlantic.

She said these workshops are an opportunity to empower consumers, which is a part of advocacy and one of the agency’s cornerstones.

In addition to the workshops, “coaches” will be provided to support participants with their specific goals -- virtually, in-person, or a hybrid of the two. One of the coaches, Ana Then of ACIL, is bilingual. At MHA Atlantic the coach is Abby Hamilton. They will be engaging and outreaching to the disability community with podcasts, a media campaign, social media campaigns and through community events and statewide disability and advocacy events.

Called the Civic Action and Engagement Initiative, the project is grant-funded by the Division of Disability Services Inclusive Healthy Communities. The workshops will be repeated eight times during the next two years.

Special thanks and congratulations to Donald Campbell and Patty Kuhn at ACIL and Vicki Phillips and Carolyn Quinn at MHA Atlantic for their efforts on this important initiative.

Look for a feature on Abby Hamilton in a future newsletter!



At left is Ana Then, a bilingual specialist who is working on the Civic Engagement initiative

For more information

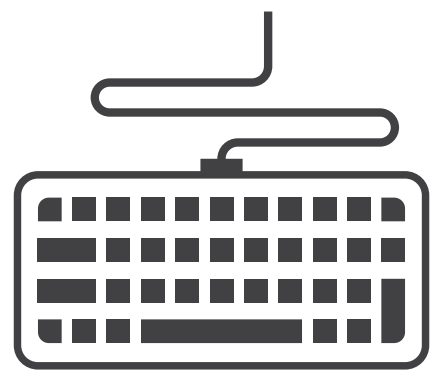
ahamilton@mhanj.org or athen@atlanticcil

609-652-3800 ext. 0315 or 609-748-2253 ext. 1006.



NEWS

briefs



Online assistance for registering to vote

MHA Atlantic staff will offer support to individuals who need help in registering to vote on Tuesday, Sept. 19 9 am to 7 pm. Staff will also provide information on how to vote, where to vote, and how to stay informed about candidates running for office. The event is part of National Voter Registration Day. To receive a link for this event, please call 609-652-3800.

Resource of the Month Spotlight on Peer Wellness Respite

A short-term stay for individuals in mental health crisis or distress can be provided to NJ residents age 18 or older. Called Peer Wellness Respite, this is an alternative to hospitalization and is offered through Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey, CSPNJ.

While at a respite location, participants, who are called “Respite guests,” work one-on-one daily with peer staff on self-determined wellness and recovery goals. Guests can be provided support at the house for a maximum of 10 days and offered follow up support for up to 30 days.

Respite staff provide 24/7 peer to peer support. Staff focus on self-care in the areas of sleep and rest, relaxation, nutrition, physical activity, and management of co-occurring medical or substance use challenges.

Three respite homes are located throughout the state, including Passaic County, Essex County, and Middlesex County.

All admissions are voluntary and are done by phone. NJ residents are able to use any of the 3 locations. For more information, please visit www.cspnj.org/respite

For Passaic, call 862-239-9896
Essex 862-229-1401
Middlesex 732-354-4403



Our New Wellness Center Coordinator



The person behind the friendly familiar face who has been facilitating groups like Meditation and Light Bulb will be a lot more visible now that she’s been promoted to a position that includes oversight of the Wellness Center at MHA Atlantic. Congratulations Yvonne Tran!

In this role, Yvonne will train, support, and supervise about one-third of the facilitators, volunteers, and any new staff who provide groups for United By Wellness (the MHANJ online wellness center) and local staff who provide in-person groups. She will also generate ideas for new groups and work toward enhancing the existing programs. Part of her job entails working with interns and supporting their training/work experience at our office.

For Yvonne, the opportunity to be the new face of the Wellness Center is also about showing the diverse community that people of color not only deserve to seek the support they need but belong in the mental health field to contribute to the beauty and importance of cultural differences and awareness. This is important given the pride she takes in her Chinese American heritage.

Her rising star at MHA Atlantic began in January 2022 as an intern from Stockton University. During that experience, she shined
(continued on page 8)

Suicide Awareness Month

Education empowers all people, regardless of their background, to make a positive difference in the life of someone they know.



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an international education program proven to be effective in teaching adults how to recognize and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges. Adult MHFA and Youth MHFA are available.

QPR TRAINING

Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) training, is an evidence-based educational program designed to teach anyone the warning signs of a suicide crisis and equip them with tools to respond.

For information or a referral for MHFA or QPR, call Karen at 609-652-3800 ext. 0319

Suicide Prevention Resource Center offers online courses, virtual learning labs, videos and webinars.

Visit sprc.org

(Yvonne continued from p. 8)

and was then hired to work in the Consumer Advocates/POST (Peer Outreach Support Team). That led to facilitating groups for United By Wellness.

“We have a diverse population in Atlantic County, and with our staff’s cultural and generational differences, I hope we can continue to use our experiences to reach out to various demographics that walk on the same path of bettering their wellness together.”

She said working against stigma will help break down some barriers and improve connections between our agency and people in underrepresented populations who are living with a mental health disorder. Specifically, she’d like to address stigma that prevents people from seeking services. Toward that end, Yvonne works with coworkers to guide content on social media. Over time, efforts to reach youth who can bring ideas and messages to families will make a difference and raise awareness, she said.

Yvonne believes younger generations are more aware about mental health, which gives her hope for currently underserved populations. To reach Yvonne, email ytran@mhanj.org or 609-652-3800 ext. 0306.

Looking ahead to
the October
newsletter...

We’re going to have
some fun with staff

B A B Y pictures!

